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## Free help available for those caring for elderly

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Almost everyone knows someone older who needs a helping hand. And with the U.S. population aging and experiencing increasing numbers of age-related diseases like Alzheimer's, more people are becoming unofficial "caregivers" to elderly friends, relatives and neighbors.

In fact, there are between five and seven million Americans currently caring for loved ones who live more than one hour away, according to research from the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. This makes it difficult for caregivers to find local resources and manage the person's care remotely, as well as communicate information to healthcare professionals, family, and friends.

Fortunately, for the scores of remote caregivers who are in this difficult situation, there is a free new service called ShirleyBOARD.com. The web site enables caregivers to centrally store important information, keep a log of daily activities, and network with other caregivers. Caregivers decide who has access to certain information. ShirleyBOARD.com's most popular feature is the journal which even has a "tagging" feature so you can quickly retrieve journal entries on particular topics.

"There are approximately six million Americans serving as long-distance caregivers for elderly parents and relatives, while also trying to care for their own immediate families and maintain full-time jobs," said Shirley-

BOARD.com's founder Mark Willaman. "That's why I launched ShirleyBOARD.com as a free service to help caregivers stay organized, better communicate with others involved in the older person's care, and find a local resource for a patient — like a doctor, home health agency or handyman — even if they aren't familiar with a patient's hometown."

And Willaman speaks from experience. He currently lives in California while providing long-distance care to his aging New Jersey-based mother, Shirley, after whom the new service is named.

Caring properly for a loved one often requires a caregiver to stay on top of a mountain of records — legal files, medical information, doctors' numbers, and more. Consequently, ShirleyBOARD.com offers a number of ways to organize and share information, including a virtual "pill box" for keeping prescription records and a personal medical contact database.

While the features are private, ensuring that no one else can access the caregiver's files, users can choose to share items from their journals or records. This gives caregivers another way to locate each other and discuss specific treatments, prescriptions, or other aspects of caregiving.

The site also offers helpful articles, an online calendar, photo sharing, and an alert feature that immediately updates friends, healthcare professionals and others on new events.